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BELSHAZZAR

A DRAMA

BY GERTRUDIS GOMEZ DE AVELLANEDA

Translated From the Spanish by
WILLIAM FREEMAN BURBANK

London: B. F. Stevens & Brown
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1914

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To the Memory of

Joaquin Miller

POET AND PLAYWRIGHT

Is dedicated this, the last drama that he ever read, as an appreciation of a long-continued friendship.

PREFACE

It was the great dramatic excellence of this work that led me to undertake to put it in such shape that it might be read with interest in the English language. "Belshazzar" will bear comparison with the best of modern plays.

Yet I had no idea, at first, of publishing this until many kind words of praise suggested the advisability of putting it into permanent form.

The kingdom of Babylonia, comprising a territory of less extent than the State of Louisiana and within approximately the same degrees of latitude, is even more interesting now than formerly because of the excavations which enable the modern historian to write with greater accuracy and fuller knowledge of a period when great things were done. A work dealing with Belshazzar, Cyrus, Daniel, and the fall of a powerful city can hardly fail to be of interest, especially when literary and dramatic merits are combined.

I wish to thank Prof. Carlos Bransby of the University of California for calling my attention to this drama and for his helpful suggestions, and I take this occasion to thank also those who read it in advance of publication and gave me their opinions. Some of these commendations are printed at the end of the book.

WILLIAM F. BURBANK.

Union Square Hotel,
San Francisco,
California.

Scenes and Characters

The scene of the play is the magnificent city of Babylon, then the richest city in the world. The time is 558 B. C., the year of its destruction by Cyrus. The events of the play just precede the fall of the city. The characters of the play, and their approximate ages, are ELDA (17), niece of the Prophet Daniel; NITOCRIS (48), mother of Belshazzar, and former queen; BELSHAZZAR (29), king of Babylonia; JECONIAH (old and blind), deposed king of Judea, who was made captive with ten thousand Hebrews; REUBEN (20), his grandson; DANIEL (50), the Hebrew prophet; RABSARES, a courtier, and NERGEL, a minister, (both of middle age); satraps, magicians, guards and slaves. Jeconiah is also known as Jehoiachin. He was overthrown by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, who removed from Jerusalem the sacred vessels of the temple.

THE PLAY OF BELSHAZZAR

The Author. Gertrudis Gomez de Avellaneda was born in Cuba in 1816, of pure Spanish stock. She lived mostly at Cadiz, Seville and Madrid. In 1840 she won two golden laurel wreaths for her poems and became the friend of the queen. She became the wife of a member of the Cortes who was the mayor of Madrid, but was soon a widow. After nine years she was married to a nobleman who occupied a seat in the Cortes. She was the author of two of the greatest sonnets in the Spanish language, some novels and several plays. She died at Madrid in 1873 at the age of 57.

The Play. Belshazzar (in Spanish, Baltasar) is one of her masterpieces. It was produced in 1858, and the theater was crowded for over thirty performances. One critic called it a "superb creation," another "a gem." It was praised for its well-arranged plan, its philosophical thought, its keen dramatic interest and its brilliant execution. Juan Valera said it was "one of the most excellent productions of which modern dramatic literature can boast."

Spanish Edition. An edition of this biblical drama was published in 1908 by the American Book Company; it was edited with introduction, notes and vocabulary by Carlos Bransby of the Spanish Department of the University of California. The play is in four acts and in verse. References to Chronicles, Kings, Jeremiah and other books of the Bible may be found in this volume.

History. When the Babylonians invaded Judah about, 587 B. C., Jehoiakim was just dead; his son Jehoiachin (Jeconiah) was besieged at Jerusalem and surrendered to Nebuchadnezzar. He was carried a captive to Babylon with his family and nearly all the princes and warriors. In the reign of Nabonidus,

(called Belshazzar in the Book of Daniel), Babylon was besieged by Cyrus, king of the Persians. The city was well supplied with provisions, and relied on the strength and height of its walls; but Cyrus turned aside the waters of the Euphrates and made his army enter the dried-up bed of the river. Had the Babylonians suspected his intentions they might have caught the enemy in a trap by closing the doors leading to the Euphrates; but they were occupied in celebrating a feast. This circumstance gave rise to the legend of Belshazzar, related in the Book of Daniel. Cyrus is not even mentioned in this account, a strange omission, considering it was he who gave to the Jews the country they had lost.

The Translation. In rendering this drama into English some of the speeches were condensed; the name Jehoiachin appears as Jeconiah and a few other slight changes have been made. The translation is free rather than literal. The translator, William F. Burbank, is a graduate of the University of California; was formerly a director of the Los Angeles Public Library, of the University Club there, and of the Southern California Academy of Sciences.

ACT I, SCENE I.

(Jeconiah, old and blind, in prison. Window with iron grating. He sits on a bench poorly clad in Hebrew costume. Elda, niece of the prophet Daniel, sitting at his feet, reads aloud from the Book of the Prophets.)

EL—(reading) "How solitary is the city that was full of people. How is she become as a widow. She that was great among the nations,—how is she become tributary. She weepeth in the night and tears are upon her cheeks. The grass grows in her streets and solitude is in her paths.'

JEC—Daughter, stop for a moment. The bitterness of that picture is graven on my heart.

EL—And here is the voice of Jeremiah. "Listen, and let these sacred prophecies assuage your grief. (reading) "The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love. O Virgin of Israel, thou shalt again be adorned with thy tabrets, and thou shalt yet plant vines upon the mountains of Samaria. Then shall the virgins rejoice in the dance. The young and the old shall rejoice together, for I shall turn their mourning into joy.'

JEC—Let us kneel and praise the God of our fathers for He is just. Thru His prophets He holds forth to us the promise of mercy and forgiveness.

EL—(kneeling) Blessed, blessed be the Lord. May His promise be fulfilled.

JEC—(caressing her head with his trembling hands) Beautiful flower, whose perfume is wasted in this dungeon dark. May the day soon come which a merciful God promises thee. Then let the grave give me repose.

EL—Why speak of dying? You are the anointed of the Lord whose mercy will restore you to the throne you lost. When your people obtain their freedom, their king will return in triumph to the throne of Solomon.

JEC—The grandeur of the past has faded from my memory, for my glory vanished like a cloud of smoke. I saw my purple trampled in the dust. The scepter,—how could my feeble hand uphold it, after a tyrant has kept me so long in chains? May the God of David reserve that scepter for a more powerful hand. And when the Supreme Ruler shall gather his ransomed children together, may I rest my weary bones in the land of my birth.

EL—But your children?

JEC—My children . . . Have they not comforted me in my captivity? May God reward them and you also, my brave, kind Elda,—you who are wasting away in this prison your youth and beauty so that you may be to this poor captive a merciful angel.

EL—I serve my king and my father.

JEC—Ah. Omit the name of king; the other is sufficient. Your father, yes, by adoption. I hope soon to be your real parent when Reuben weds you.

EL—Your grandson's noble heart is not swayed alone by woman's love. Tho born in exile and under the oppressor's yoke, he is true to the royal blood that courses in his veins. He will not sing a nuptial hymn to the clanking of chains. Let us wait. I hold faith in Heaven's promise.

JEC—(rising) My soul's hope is also in God. But alas, it is not long since I presumed that the death of our inhuman master would change our lot. Yet Nebuchadnezzer lies cold in the grave, and pity has not softened the heart of his successor.

EL—Hush! Some one is coming.

JEC—They are not the footsteps of my grandson.

SCENE II.

(Enter Nitocris, the queen, and Rabsares, the courtier.)

EL—(on seeing them as they stop at the door for a moment) Ah!

RAB—I should announce Your Majesty.

NIT—It is not necessary. (she advances.)

RAB—(aside) You will serve my purpose, O queen.

NIT—(casting a look around the dungeon) My heart breaks with pity.

JEC—Who is this?

ELDA—I know not.

NIT—(approaching them) May the gods give health to you both.

ELDA—(saluting her) Madam!

NIT—(regarding her with emotion) How young! (To the prisoner Jeconiah) I lament your fate.

JEC—Who is it that comes within this prison gate?

NIT—One who knows your ill condition. Pity touches my heart. I am Belshazzar's mother.

JEC—The queen!

NIT—Yes, the queen. I come in kindness to ameliorate your lot. (To Elda) The wisdom of Daniel, your noble uncle, I much esteem. Because of this I wish to favor the Jewish people. I would protect you, orphan that you are, and as for you, Jeconiah, I hope you will soon be free. I feel sure my son will not deny this balm to you, tho the time of full reparation is not yet at hand.

JEC—May my grateful heart.....

NIT—Enough! As to you, my beautiful child, it will not do to bury your life within these gloomy walls. At my side and in my palace you will have shelter. You are going to have light and life, a mother and a home.

ELDA—I! (shuddering)

JEC—Permit me, at your feet.....

NIT—No. Arise!

JEC—Her beauty has been fading in this filthy dungeon. May you keep your promise, O queen. Save this angel of my exile!

NIT—The light of another day will not find her here.

RAB—(aside) My plan will succeed.

ELDA—(to Jeconiah in a tone of fear) Shall I forsake thee?

JEC—My dear, your kindness has been too greatly taxed by this poor old man.

ELDA—No! No! Let me stay at your side. Your prison is my world.

JEC—Heaven would hate me if I permitted this sacrifice,—your sublime kindness. No, beloved girl, be happy in the favors of this glorious queen.

NIT—You may meet each other frequently.

JEC—(to Elda) Do you hear?

ELDA—Ah!

JEC—You will be able to see me.

NIT—And he will soon be free.

JEC—Think of that!—A brief absence,—what does it matter?

ELDA—O father! (rushing to his arms)

JEC—(pressing her against his heart) O Daughter! daughter!

NIT—I leave you in your affections. Her good sense will prompt this girl to follow the counsels of one she calls father. Now, venerable man, do not grieve. Bid her farewell. Rabsares will come to take her to me, and I will be prepared to redeem the promise which I gave. May the gods I worship change your unhappy lot!

JEC—And to thee, O queen, may the one True God His blessings give!

NIT—(to Rabsares on leaving) It has been a pleasant duty, Rabsares. I give thee thanks. (she departs)

RAB—(following her) (aside) I do not venture to thank thee altho my will is done.

SCENE III

(Jeconiah, Elda, and afterwards Reuben)

JEC—See how soon to be fulfilled are the promises of great joy! And do you weep? What troubles thy young heart?

ELDA—O pardon me, my father. Without reason are my tears. Here our Reuben comes to give me strength and courage.

REU—(who is supposed to have met the queen and followed her with his gaze. He is astonished). It is she! yes, it is she! (drawing near.) What means this visit from the queen?

JEC—Bless her, my son, before you further speak.

REU—Father! you surprise me!

JEC—(pointing to Elda) No longer will you see her beauty fade away in sadness and consume itself in tears. She herself will tell you of the change and of the hope that now smiles upon us. A thousand thanks will I give to God, and I will commit you both to His infinite kindness.

(Exit Jeconiah thru the side door, led by Elda who returns to the scene).

SCENE IV

(Reuben and afterwards Elda)

REU—(after a moment of silence) My father says a change of fortune has come, yet Elda casts down her eyes and trembles. What does it mean? (To Elda who returns weeping) In heaven's name! Speak, my darling! Quick! Speak to your lover! Why do you weep?

ELDA—O, that it were possible to leave this place without grief! Here were my happy childhood days, and here you gave me your sacred vow.

REU—Your absence, O God!—Is your cruel ab-

sence to be the beginning of a new misfortune? O, Elda, I would not buy the scepter of the world for the price of our separation! Where will they take you and with what intent? What fortune could I wish that would pay me for this torture? Who arranges this ominous separation. Speak to me!

ELDA—Our misfortunes have touched the noble nature of the queen. She wants to give me refuge in the royal palace of Babylon. Other favors are to follow.

REU—(Impetuously) I would have refused them at once. "Here," I would say, "Here were my joys and my sorrows. Within these gloomy walls my helpless youth I spent, and here my lover and myself from tender childhood lived one life together, like trees whose branches intertwine and give each other mutual support."

ELDA—So would I have spoken, too. But, would it not be unfair to my Nation and my King if I rejected the royal clemency and turned it into hate? I ought not take the risk, nor can I.

REU—But the queen?.... What does she intend?

ELDA—To lighten the yoke upon our people. With trembling lips it pleased her to promise liberty to our blind and hapless friend.

REU—What is that you say?

ELDA—Her pity might turn to hate if I refused the queen, and I would only add to our misfortunes. But I will do it if you say, and subject everything to your desire, for in the greatest joy I see nothing which could atone for the sorrows I might cause you.

REU—No; I am not deaf to duty's voice. I have a fatherland, a father whom I adore. Accept! Accept! Yes, I grant it. And I promise to restrain my tears.

ELDA—I hear your words, and my tears increase. My face is bathed in them.

REU—(taking her hand) Dear girl, my friend, my sister, and my loved one! I trust that Providence

intends this separation for our good. Heaven will bring these many trials to a fortunate end, and will grant my wish to become your happy husband.

ELDA—But in my soul I feel,....even my reason strugles against it.....I feel I know not what,—something vague, ... a cruel presentiment.

REU—(aside) And I also.

ELDA—See how I tremble!

REU—O, Elda, listen. I now enjoy liberty, and nothing prevents me from having sweet converse with you wherever you may be. Yes, do not cry. The sacrifice that sacred duty asks is not so great. It will seem lovely to be away from this dungeon with its poisoned air.

ELDA—Look about you! Do you not find, dear Reuben, tender associations! There when the morning sun looked thru our narrow window, we said our prayer, and the little bird which used to take food from my hand would add his joyful song to our supplication. There we would take our frugal meal, blessed by a fatherly hand ,and on that bench the old man would fall asleep to my loving words.

REU—Ah, yes!

ELDA—How many restless nights you quieted his soul by reading from the Holy Prophets! How many times my hand would lovingly wipe away the last bitter tears while on his lips a blessing lingered!

REU—(deeply moved) Hush! Be still!

ELDA—(pointing at the window) That little cloud with rosy hue, that glows and gleams in the sky's bright blue,—perhaps is the same that our eyes beheld on yesterday in its wandering course. And soon that star will shine again,—we did not know its name at all,—and every night its beauty shows a witness to our tender vows.

REU—No more! No more!

ELDA—Where else can we find these memories of pleasure and of pain, so grateful to our hearts?

REU—O Elda! Elda!

ELDA—What splendor of another's glories can

make us forget this roof?

REU—Father, cheer up! (looking within)

ELDA—Let him not guess the meaning of these tears.

REU—No; wipe them away. Let duty alone control your heart. Imitate my courage, dearest one! (He advances to help the blind old man.)

SCENE V.

(Elda, Reuben and Jeconiah)

JEC—(taking Reuben's arm) Have you thanked Heaven for the mercies of today?

REU—Does not the Almighty read our hearts, O father? Be seated. (The old man sits down.) Soon, as I hope, you will leave this prison.

JEC—Tho I would like to feel the sun and breathe the wholesome air rather than these infected vapors, it is not these benefits that my heart most wishes. (To Elda.) You will be near the queen. Should you win her favor, do not forget, O my daughter, that Zion is unhappy,—a slave groaning in captivity.

ELDA—I cannot forget it.

JEC—Faithful to your people always be, and to your God.

ELDA—Yes, I swear it!

JEC—(Pointing upwards) Heaven has heard you.

ELDA—(Kneeling) And here at your feet, O father, I repeat the sacred promise. (solemnly). I swear to remain faithful to God, to my fatherland and to my lover!

REU—(Kneeling likewise). I hear your vows, Oh Elda, and give my hand to you in sight of Heaven and my father.

JEC—(Arising and laying his hands on their heads while they kneel). Father immortal, God of Abra-

ham, Isaac and Jacob, sublime Creator of Heaven and Earth! In thy most sacred name I receive the promises which these youths have spoken. Thrice blessed be their pure, eternal union! Sanctify it in Thy glory and protect them!

REU—(rising with Elda). This ring I hand you my sainted mother wore until her death.

ELDA—And until I follow her unto the grave I will wear it as a pledge of sacred faith.

JEC—Listen! I hear footsteps.

REU—Someone's coming.

ELDA—(aside) Oh, it oppresses my sad heart.

REU—(In a low voice to Elda) O, my beloved, the dreaded time is come.

ELDA—I will be brave.

SCENE VI

(The same, Rabsares and slaves with peasants.)

RAB—The exalted mother of the king sends to you, O noble maiden, these presents in token of protection. You must come into her presence beautifully arrayed.

ELDA—I?

JEC—What kindness!

RAB—Without delay, prepare to do her pleasure.

ELDA—I am ready. I will follow thee. But I cannot put off my Jewish garb for any other. Nor does it become a captive to wear costly gems.

JEC—Let her modesty excuse her.

RAB—My mission is ended. (To Elda) The queen awaits you.

JEC—(with emotion in his voice) Go, my child. The Lord will keep thee.

ELDA—(kissing his hand) Farewell, dear father.

JEC—Farewell! and may the angels keep thee.

ELDA—(extending her hand to Reuben) Brother!

I will.....

REU—I shall go with you.

ELDA—No; take my place by his side. Comfort him in his affliction, but forget me not.

REU—Forget..... I never can.

ELDA—(to Rabsares) Let us leave. (She goes reluctantly; Rabsares and the slaves follow.)

JEC— (anxiously, after a moment's silence.) Has she gone?

REU—(drawing close to him.) She has gone.

SCENE VII.

JEC—(hearing his grandson sobbing) Weep; yes, weep! No longer will your eyes with each day's light behold the lovely face that drove your cares away. No longer will you see her innocent, smiling lips, nor will these prison walls hear the sound of that voice which charmed the ear and comforted the heart.

REU—O, father!

JEC—In our woe we are comforted by knowing that Heaven will bring good fortune to Elda, and that God does not forget his captive people.

REU—Our great duty is done, and joy will follow us. But someone comes. It is Daniel.

SCENE VIII.

DAN—May the Lord be with you.

JEC—The God of the Hebrews is our Protector.

DAN—I know it, Jeconiah, His justice may afflict us sorely, but it will not suffer the mechinations of the wicked to prevail, for, while they are crafty,

God gives wisdom to the good.

REU—You are disturbed, O Daniel!

DAN—No; I am serene, for my heart leans upon Him. I come here to defeat their vicious plans.

JEC—How!

REU—Explain!

DAN—(To Jeconiah) Do not let my innocent niece be taken from you.

REU—Elda!

JEC—(aside) Heavens!

DAN—Her peace, her purity, her virtue are in danger.

JEC—(aside) Merciful God!

REU—Are in danger?

DAN—Yes; listen! (a brief pause. Jeconiah and Reuben in anxious expect tion.) Of the tyrant Nebuchadnezzar was Belshazzar born, the despot who sees the world all prostrate at his feet. Not with anger does he trample upon men, but with contempt. God did not put into his bosom a mean heart, but this man early drank the cup of vice. Mighty from his birth, the child of fortune, he took everything, he abused everything. He possessed without desiring, and used without pleasure. His gods were but names, his wishes were laws, his inheritance the world. And men he regarded as so many cattle.

REU—Go on!

JEC—Proceed!

DAN—He is surfeited with the power, the splendor and the joys of life. With early wrinkles his face is marked, and at an age when youth is fair, his soul is withered. Consumed with weariness, he finds no peace. Such is the King Belshazzar. This monarch who rules over many provinces and at whose royal feet all kings pay tribute, ... he, whom sensuality has weakened, scorns kingly power and places the scepter in a woman's hands.

JEC—The scepter in his mother's hands?

DAN—Yes. She is generous and does not abuse

power, altho a jealous court accuses her of that. Those who wish power are offended and the corrupt satraps do not forgive this virtuous queen.

JEC—And Rabsares? .....

DAN—Is a coward. He flatters the very one against whom he plots. With wonderful craft he adds to his intrigues, but thus far all have failed in the apathy of the king. In vain does that persuasive man exert himself with Belshazzar. Ministers and courtiers have tried to waken the king from his dreams, and have united to employ every conceivable device, but all in vain.

JEC—(anxiously) But.....

REU—(eagerly) And Elda?

DAN—Among the many plans proposed, Rabsares has a new one on which they count.

JEC—(anxiously) What is it?

DAN—They think the power of love will animate him anew; if that sublime fire ever kindled his cold heart.

REU—What! .....

DAN—The beauties of the harem he looks on with disdain.

JEC—What then?

DAN—There are immaculate damsels among the Jews.

REU—And will they dare.....

DAN—What rank or condition would they respect?

JEC—O, God of Justice!

DAN—I know the plan. I understand their wicked purpose. Perfidious men! They will make use of the most sacred sentiments. I know it is the noble nature of the queen which they propose as a cover for their iniquity. I know they have seen my niece and want to take her away from us. They propose her beauty for Belshazzar's eyes.

REU—Ah! Let us run!

JEC—I shall die. (drops on the bench).

REU—I swear to rescue my betrothed.

DAN—Hold! O God, that terrible excitement!....

REU—It means the striking of a blow. Follow me!

DAN—Whither?

REU—To the tyrant's home.

JEC—(with despair) And it was I, a fool, that gave her up.

REU—It is my place to save her. (leaves hurriedly.)

JEC—Oh yes! Save her, my son!

DAN—(advancing to the middle of the stage and raising his hands to Heaven). King of Kings! Let Thy voice command! To Thee I commit my cause, for Thou alone art great!

ACT II.

(Night. Palace and Gardens of Babylon. Fountains, Statues, Obelisks. Lights in profusion. At the right the royal seats under a canopy of flowers.)

SCENE I.

(Nitocris and Rabsares at the right.)

NIT—All is well. But why this unexpected feast?

RAB—To divert the king. The ministers have arranged it with his approval.

NIT—For diversion? What cares surround him? Belshazzar forgets he has a scepter in his hand!

RAB—If our august monarch has an occasional respite from his kingly duties, a mother's care compensates his Kingdom for that neglect. You command when he is silent. While he is asleep, you are vigilant. And your glory grows as his declines.

What is there that Babylon does not owe to you?

NIT—Enough! Stop!

RAB—If the mighty Euphrates was made to form deep lakes, if the waters with impetuous force escaped to wash two distant shores, they found a great bridge to stop them. If the waters murmur in the deep canals and rush to irrigate extensive fields,—what hands but thine have worked such giant tasks, and left in glory the Assyrian name?

NIT—Some there are who sow benefits and reap ingratitude.

RAB—(perplexed) Madame, ...

NIT—Some consider it a shame that my weak hands should hold the reins of this great nation.

RAB—I do not know. (Have they betrayed me?)

NIT—Against me the satraps have been plotting. Nor let your heart contain a fear I do not have in mine. May the gods grant the wishes of my adversaries, and may Belshazzar, aroused from his apathy, at last decide to take up his duties, so that I in modest retirement may admire the achievements of his glorious reign.

RAB—For such great enterprise, O queen, man's efforts are too weak.

NIT—Ah no! Yet I have hope. It is not thru weakness that the King's great soul remains inactive. That soul but sleeps; it is not dead.

RAB—And do you suppose.....

NIT—That a day will come when he will shake off his lethargy.

RAB—(aside) Will she suspect?

NIT—From the ease which enervates his manly heart he will be shaken by the danger which alarms me.

RAB—Danger?

NIT—The Medes and the Persians are leagued against us.

RAB—Those nations yet bear the marks of the Assyrian yoke. They are terrified at the very name of Babylon. Could they forget the past, they would

still see on every hand such bloody signs as would be a warning to the bold. Let them ask Tyre whether her opulence saved her from the severity of our wrath. Let Samaria and Judea say what we did to them!

NIT—Alas, those subjected people find refuge in our bosom. In their veins are nourished the feelings of revenge. Nebuchadnezzar's vaulting ambition was to be worshipped as a god by the nations which his valor conquered. He disdained to be loved. Belshazzar inherits his pride but not the glory to support it; nor has he won triumphs to exalt him.

RAB—But your nobility can moderate their ill will. Do not the Jewish captives enjoy your protection? Is not Daniel venerated at your bidding and counted among the wise? Have not prison gates been opened at your command, and has not your clemency been extended to the blind old man who lost his throne?

NIT—The gods have recognized what good I did by giving me the affection of a tender and noble heart. Rabsares, Elda is a treasure of grace and virtue.

RAB—It is thru my counsel that she is now at your side.

NIT—My grateful heart acknowledges the debt.

RAB—Now, lay aside your fears, O queen, Belshazzar is coming and his minister is now here.

(She goes out thru the left door as Nergel enters. He salutes profoundly and then approaches Rabsares who goes toward him.)

SCENE II.

(Rabsares and Nergel.)

RAB—Nergel!

NER—Will the King see tonight the captive Hebrew girl?

RAB—Among the ladies of the court the queen will bring her.

NER—And she suspects nothing?

RAB—She places confidence in me; she has not the faintest notion of our plan.

NER—And is that slave girl's beauty so very great?

RAB—See for yourself; here she comes.

SCENE III.

(The same, Elda and ladies.)

RAB—(going to meet Elda) Accept, fair girl....

ELDA—Where is the queen?

RAB—Accept my congratulations. In thy good fortune our hearts are enraptured,—hearts that but a moment ago were sharing your sorrows.

ELDA—Thanks. I am looking for the queen.

RAB—With her royal son she comes; the king's retinue is now entering these gardens.

(The royal suite begins to appear.)

ELDA—(To her companions) Quick! Let us go to our places.

RAB—(Detaining her and speaking in a low voice) Do not forget, noble maid, that when Belshazzar gives the sign, the captives' chains are broken.

ELDA—May the sovereign will of God be done!

SCENE IV.

(The same. Reuben enters with the retinue; he is dressed in Babylonian costume. Afterwards, Belshazzar and Nitocris. The retinue which precedes

the King is composed of courtiers and slaves. They spread out on both sides of the stage where also the queen's ladies are placed. In the rear are the king's slaves as he enters.)

ELDA—(On going to the left to receive Nitocris, she meets Reuben.) Ah! it is you!

REU—Hush! do not ruin yourself.

(This short dialogue in low voice).

ELDA—You in disguise!..... You here?

REU—Your innocence is in peril.

ELDA—Heavens!

REU—But I will protect it.

ELDA—Should they discover you.....

REU—Do not fear.

(He makes a sign to Elda to proceed. She goes out for a moment behind her companions, appearing again with the queen.)

NER—(in a low voice), It seems to me, Rabsares, that the slave girl and that man yonder have exchanged a few words.

RAB—(Without seeing Reuben who is behind some other men) Oh, she is a stranger in court. Behold the King!

NER—(To the King's women who are grouped in the rear end of the stage). Let clouds of perfume fill the air and the women display their charms. Let grateful sounds pervade the hall.

(Soft music supposed to be produced by female slaves on zithers, etc. Some scatter perfumes; others advance with rhythmical steps to the hymn which the rest are singing. Graceful figures in the center. Wreathes are made which, when the dancing ends, are thrown at the feet of the king. Belshazzar enters with his mother as the hymn commences. He crosses the stage and takes a seat on the divan prepared for him, Nitocris on his left. All bow profoundly as the king enters.)

HYMN.

Bright with its diamond rays
  Shines the crown of our glorious fathers.
And the winds grow weary with praise
  Of Babylon's greatness and grandeur.
Fertile and fruitful her streams,
  The gods smile their welcome upon her,
While Beauty before her gleams
  And strews her pathway with flowers.

BEL—(wearily) Enough!

NER—Beauty at your feet desires to wish you well if you will but look upon her.

BEL—(aside) The same thing always.

NER—I venture to express the hope that the feast arranged for your pleasure will have your favor.

BEL—Yes. You have displayed wonderful and exquisite things. You have surrounded me with delights. (He arises and kicks the wreaths scattered before him. He walks among the kneeling women but without looking at them. The women, abashed, turn aside). But let those women go, and throw away these flowers!

NER—I beg your Majesty's pardon. (Perplexed.)

RAB—(Aside) There is no way.

BEL—Too much incense,—it chokes me.

NER—(Stammering) Wishing, in my boldness, to stuggle against that weariness which annoys you....

BEL—Was it your mighty scheme to condense the air about me and trouble my eyes?

NER—(Bending one knee) I am a fool. Your clemency?.. .. ..

RAB—(Also supplicating) His zeal, O King, let that excuse him.

NIT—To please you was his desire.

BEL—It is well. I will be patient, but tell me, Nergel, is there nothing new in the world?

NER—My Lord.. .. ..

BEL—Is there nothing but this old splendor and stale pomp.....pleasures that are heaped up

and do not even afford the lowest enjoyment? What care I for beauties that sell themselves and for courtiers who always flatter?

(All the courtiers are confused; they look at each other. The women are humiliated and retire.)

NER—My Lord,.. .. ..

BEL—If you wish to overcome this deadening disgust against which I contend in vain,—this second nature,—show me something that my soul must desire,—some good of high degree! Not something I can have by reaching out my hand! Give me (the cost is nothing) some great passion to fill my soul which now is filled with scorn. Arouse in it the fire of love, or, may be, the lust of hatred and revenge. But give me hope and let me use my strength! Give me a nation to conquer, crimes to commit, happiness to attain, or tortures to endure! Give me pleasure or pain worthy of a soul whose longing is not merely to see and enjoy,—something greater than the world, something higher than myself!

NER—It is impossible,—what you desire.

RAB—That cannot be, O King. There is no power which can resist thee—no happiness thou dost not possess.

BEL—Yes. I am then so supremely happy!

NER—The immortals envy thee.

BEL—Perhaps they, too, grow weary of repose! Nergel, if it is true your intention is to please me, make me forget for a moment my prodigious happiness! (He sits down again).

NIT—When Heaven gave you, my son, so vast an empire, it gave you also many cares. With these you can fill the void in your ardent breast. Why do you show in vain a sacred scepter in your hand, a golden crown upon your head?

BEL—And what am I to do?

NIT—Rule.. .. .. ..govern!

BEL—Have not the people laws enough?

NIT—But it is the duty of rulers to have them obeyed.

BEL—And would the world be better were I

to take that care? Do not men desire to rebel and to be vicious? Penalties and rewards—what good have they done? As they always have been, are not men so today?

NIT—But by ruling those men your great ancestors became mighty in battle and made their names immortal.

BEL—(with bitter sarcasm) Oh! Yes! Of course, I envy their lot! The world made gods of them when death turned them to dust.

NIT—Their deeds of glory are immortal.

BEL—In what do their glories consist?

NIT—In conquests, victories, which history preserves.

BEL—I shall not wage war to make food for birds, for another piece of land, or another band of slaves.

NIT—But you have duties.. .. .. ..

BEL—Yes; to swallow up my weaknesses.

NIT—What troubles you?

BEL—Existence itself.

NIT—Are not pleasures everywhere about you? And is it not a great thing, my Lord, to comfort those who weep?

BEL—I am so very happy, O queen, that I am envious of grief itself.

NIT—Bestowing benefits broadcast.. .. ..

BEL—They turn to poison when given to the unworthy.

NIT—But there is good in the world.

BEL—And plenty of wickedness.

NIT—But virtue is the highest good.. .. ..

BEL—And men do not attain it.

NIT—The gods.. .. ..

BEL—They are but names.

NIT—Eternal glory.. .. ..

BEL—Is but a mist.

NIT—(after a brief pause) The people whom you govern.. .. .. ..

BEL—They will not say that I oppress them.

NIT—Their admiration.. .. .. ..

BEL—Is worth nothing to me.

NIT—With such scorn you humiliate them and arouse criticism.

BEL—Buzzing insects do not annoy my ears.

NIT—Ah! But you put the throne in jeopardy.

BEL— (rising) And what is a throne? What is pomp and blazonry, if the mind is not elevated nor the heart renewed? Born on this height, I cannot, mother, appreciate it. There would have been glory in overcoming; its possession is not a boon.

NIT—You should remember the great Nebuchadnezzar.

BEL—He fled to the beasts that he might forget how much glory there is in ruling men.

NIT—It remains for me to tell you.....

BEL—Nothing more! My power I have confided to your hands. Nergel, let the festivities proceed. (Sits down again and becomes apathetic.)

RAB—(to the queen) The Jewish race excel in music. Now before the monarch let that maid display her skill. (Pointing to Elda). Draw near, young woman, your mistress would hear you sing.

NIT—(pointing to the King) Let your sweet voice dispel his melancholy.

ELDA—Kindly excuse me, O queen. I am a child of captivity and there is no melody in my voice.

RAB—You refuse?.. .. ..

ELDA—(With dignity) Only the birds amuse their captors. They can express their grief in gentle notes.

(Belshazzar looks at her.)

RAB—How?

NIT—What say you?

ELDA—There are no altars now for the God of Heaven; no feasts nor songs for widowed Judah. Her harp hangs tuneless on the willows by these shores. In our hapless solitude weeping is our only song.

NER—Impudent creature!

NIT—(earnestly) The King hears you.

BEL—And orders you to sing.

ELDA—No! I cannot obey.

RAB—O, you are rash. (in a low voice.)

NER—What audacity! (some of the courtiers are shocked)

NIT—Your resistance goes too far, dear Elda.

ELDA—O queen. My people groan under the yoke.

BEL—And is it not known among that Jewish rabble that the word of their king and master is the law?

ELDA—In thee they see their conqueror but they do not revere their king.

NIT—Elda!

RAB—(In a low voice) You are condemning yourself to death!

NIT—(Also in a low voice) In the name of Heaven, yield!

NER—(Putting the psaltery in her hands) Take it, slave, and subdue your pride.

ELDA—There are no chains that can fetter the will. (She throws down the psaltery. There is excitement. Belshazzar rises and looks at her with surprise but without anger.)

NER—O, ye gods!

RAB—Woe be unto you!

NIT—What have you done? (To the king) O, my Lord, may her folly find pity in your heart!

RAB—(Beseeching) She has a father in prison and she deserves thy indulgence.

BEL—(After looking at her a moment) She does not seem to ask it.

NIT—(Drawing near to Elda) She comes to ask pardon at thy feet.

RAB—And you don't humble yourself?

ELDA—People of my creed should bend their knees only before their God.

NIT—(With tone of reproval) Why, girl!

RAB—All is lost!

NER—Greater insolence there cannot be. (A pause. General astonishment.)

BEL—And thy father who is a prisoner,—what crime did he commit?

ELDA—Defending his crown which thy tyranny

struck down.

RAB—Hush!

BEL—Jeconiah!

NIT—That old man at whose name this anger is aroused has paid the penalty by this time, my Lord.

ELDA—With heartless anger his enemy took away from him the light of day.

RAB—What! (With renewed astonishment at her boldness).

NIT—Enough! No more!

BEL—(To Nergel) Without delay let her be freed. Give her an allowance worthy of her rank. (General surprise.)

NER—How!

NIT—(To Rabsares). Pity has won.

RAB—Or love! My plan has succeeded (aside).

ELDA—(Clasping her hands in gratitude) O, my lord!

BEL—(To Nergel who looks at him and hesitates) Let my will be done forthwith.

NER—(Bowing) I obey.

NIT—And I beg of you this favor—to have the old man placed at your feet to show his gratitude. (She goes away hurriedly with Nergel. The ladies of her suite follow.)

ELDA—Let us follow after the queen.

BEL—(Detaining her). Not you.

ELDA—King.. .. ..

BEL—I desire to speak with you. Let all retire!

REU—(who has eagerly followed the whole scene) Ah! (aside)

RAB—(Aside) He is in my power! (To the courtiers) Let us obey.

(All go out except Reuben.)

ELDA—Great God, sustain me! (aside)

REU—(Aside) Had I listened to the counsels of anger.. .. ..

BEL—What are you waiting for? Why so slow in obeying me?

(Elda looks at her lover in a beseeching manner. He hesitates but yields.)

ELDA—Oh, Heavens!
REU—Nothing.
BEL—Be gone!
REU—(Aside) I'll not go far.

SCENE V.

(Belshazzar and Elda. A moment of silence. The King seats himself.)

BEL—Maid of Judah, you have found favor in my eyes.

ELDA—For what you have done, my lord, my heart is grateful.

BEL—It is a slight token of my royal will. Your pride has charmed me. Your voice is not for slaves. You shall see them like reptiles at your feet, if I but give the sign. For me alone reserve your songs; for me alone your beauty.

ELDA—(Aside) What is it I hear?

BEL—A glance from you and the blood mounts in my veins. Come, draw near! Why are you afraid?

ELDA—Such language, my lord!

BEL—A victory you won today. No other beauty could have dared to ask fortune for it. You have moved a heart of adamant. Rejoice in your beauty which sets my heart afire. Run to the harem and proclaim to all that you are now my favorite slave .

ELDA—I?

BEL—My preference raises you to that high station.

ELDA—I in thy harem?

BEL—You will be one among a thousand. Let your sorrows come to an end. Stop frowning and raise your head!

ELDA—Say no more, my lord. You are mistaken,

or else I do not understand you. Perhaps I am dreaming.

BEL—(Rising) Then let love come to awaken you.

ELDA—Stop!

BEL—How! (with astonishment.)

ELDA—My lord, don't attempt to approach me with such mad desire. I am Jewish born.

BEL—(After a little suspense) It is I who wonders whether I am dreaming. Am I not Belshazzar? Am I not thy master?

ELDA—My life is thine but not my soul.

BEL—What does she say? (Aside, as if struck by a new idea) Ah, yes! Such skillful resistance is an effective spur to my desire. I thank you, girl, that I no longer see about me a mute obedience. I look on you. Your seductive indifference, your superb beauty, your unusual wit, ... No price is too dear for what my love expects of yours. Set the price yourself.

ELDA—I ask of you, O king, the respect due to misfortune. My people boast not of pride, and I respect the scepter which you wield. But keep thy love, keep those gifts which my humble heart despises.

BEL—(More and more astonished.) She scorns them! (Aside)

ELDA—Yes, O king, if thou desirest to buy my virtue, the gold of all the world is not enough, and a hundred crowns upon thy head are of no avail. (She is about to leave.)

BEL—Wait!

ELDA—No. No more!

BEL—I command you.

ELDA—My lord!

BEL—(impatiently) Enough! I admire the fierce nature that adds new charm to your beauty and I honor it. To you will I owe a victory whose price you have enhanced. Be stubborn no longer lest you weary my patience.

ELDA—(Aside) You heartless king!

BEL—I wish this quarrel to be over.

ELDA—Can you be so base as to .....

BEL—(Interrupting) I grant you to choose the moment of my joy.

ELDA—Never! Never! I would die first!

BEL—Do you dare to be foolish?

ELDA—I do my duty.

BEL—My wishes make the law.

ELDA—I keep God's law.

BEL—Fear the anger that your obstinacy calls forth!

ELDA—I only fear the wrong.

BEL—In my hand is a scepter which makes the nations tremble.

ELDA—No tyrant's scepter is able to subdue the heart, my lord!

BEL—Slave!

ELDA—Thy fury does not scare nor thy majesty astound me. My helpless innocence is protected by a power before which yours is but a shadow.

BEL—(Almost beside himself and seizing her by the arm). Where is that power? Where? you foolish girl, who makes my favor change into fury? Who does not regard my will supreme? Who comes to save you from my own caprice? (Reuben rushes between them.)

SCENE VI.

(The same. Reuben; Rabsares and courtiers.)

REU—I, O, tyrant!

ELDA—(Aside) Great Heavens!

REU—While I live, do not hope to carry out your unholy purpose!

BEL—(Struck with astonishment) Who is this madman?

ELDA—(Aside) Just Heavens!

REU—A man am I who nourishes revenge. Fatherland, wealth, happiness, glory, power..... all were taken from me by your people But I keep this hatred which sustains my life and threatens yours.

ELDA—O, what is it you say?

(The king moves to the side whence his courtiers went out.)

REU—Call thy court, yes, call it! Call that band of slaves and women. Make boasts to them of your strength!

ELDA—Reuben! Have pity on me!

BEL—(turning toward him) Do you not know who I am?

REU—I know you well. I know you wear a crown that you dishonor and which you could not defend like a man. I know that without glory, virtue or energy, you are tired of yourself. Your useless life you spend among perfumes, like a woman. You hold all men in contempt and even blaspheme the name of God. But by Him, O Belshazzar, have kings their rule, and for the tyrant it is useless to demand respect.

(While Reuben makes his speech, Rabsares and some courtiers enter. They stand for a while motionless. Then they rush upon Reuben with angry exclamation.)

BEL—(Puts his hands to his sword. On coming near Reuben he stops. Reuben bares his breast) You wretch!

ELDA—(Coming between) No!

REU—Strike! You are surrounded by a hundred swords. Disarmed and among assassins, I do not flee.

BEL—(Aside) His face reveals the astonishment he feels at his own anger. He puts his hand to his breast with a sort of joy born of the consciousness of his own agitation). At last! my heart!

REU—Why do you hesitate? Strike, and at

one blow make an end of me. My soul was never a slave to your power. It was exalted, tho in chains, while yours was debased, tho upon a throne. In this unequal combat your only glory is the laurel of a murderer.

BEL—(Trembling at the consciousness of his rage). O!

RAB—Let him perish!

ELDA—Alas for Reuben!

BEL—(As swords are raised over Reuben's head.) Let no one touch him. (After a long pause.) Who is this man?

RAB—A son of the Jew whose chains you ordered broken.

BEL—Her brother!

ELDA—Let him not provoke your anger. Have pity, O king, for you are strong.

REU—(In a reproving tone.) Elda!

ELDA—(Still beseeching) Think not of his fault,—his audacity, but only of his misfortune. Fate has robbed him of everything, O king.

REU—But not of courage or virtue.

ELDA—I am the sole cause of his transgression. Upon me, then, let the weight of your judgment fall.

REU—Enough!

RAB—My lord, I await thy orders.

BEL—Take the slave to my harem.

ELDA—O! (Faints away in the arms of courtiers. They take her away.)

REU—(Drawing a sword he had concealed under his disguise.) Death, rather! (Throwing himself at Elda; the king shakes him by the arm. Reuben in a rage.) O, tremble!

BEL—(To his followers) Withdraw!

REU—King ..... (with astonishment and hesitation.) What will you.....

BEL—(with imperious gesture.) I would have you go.

(The courtiers go out wondering.)

SCENE VII

(Belshazzar, Reuben.)

REU—Alone with me..... Here!

BEL— (Turning toward him) They are now far away.

REU—What! Do you think.....

BEL—(With fierce joy) I think I have found a man whose opposition is bitter. But woe to you if ..... (Rushes upon Reuben who is confused by anger and astonishment. Reuben is at once disarmed.)

REU—Ah!

BEL—(Pointing to the fallen sword) Pick it up!

REU—No! Here is my breast.

BEL—(With contempt, and sheathing his sword) Take up your sword, you wretched fool.

REU— (Desperately) Kill me! God gives you that right. Kill me!

BEL—(With bitter irony). You see it now. A just God has made the lamb the prey of the lion, and the defenseless dove the prey of the eagle. By inexorable law the weak is devoured by the strong, the little by the big, the poor by the rich. That explains your lot and accounts for mine.

REU—Crush me, then!

BEL—No! I pardon you, for I owe more to you than to my royal throne. Now I have found that emotion. Here I have felt my heart burn in mighty anger. What joy in that! Do not think it strange At last I am happy in forgetting that I am a king and feeling myself a man ..... You are free!

SCENE VIII.

(Reuben, afterwards Jeconiah, and finally Daniel.)

REU—I ! I! Pardoned! I conquered by him! Dishonored sword, pierce my breast before my tongue

shall utter blasphemy. (Picking up the sword) Ah! I am not the master of my life. (Pausing.) God gave it me. He wishes me to drag it along. But I cannot, O Lord!

JEC—(Within) Reuben!

JEC—(Entering). To this place a man conducted me. It was the queen's order, and I am told that Belshazzar has given us liberty. Reuben! Elda! Come! Or has a dream seduced my senses?

REU—Father!

JEC—O, son! Let Elda come also. Let her come quick and praise the Lord who has changed misfortune into joy. Where? Where is she?

REU—(Aside) O, Heaven!

JEC—What! Silent? And your hand trembles in mine?

REU—(Aside) Unhappy heart! Why don't you break?

JEC—Reuben! Speak! For God's sake! You see my anguish? Your beloved,—where is she?

REU—Don't ask me.

JEC—(Greatly agitated) Heartless man, you do not answer. O, beloved daughter, I will search for you.

REU—(With despair) Look for her. You will find her disgraced.

JEC—She? And it is you that say it?

REU—Yes; this wretch, helpless and bewailing my shame. Yes, I who in the face of Heaven, which does not permit death to end my grief,—I will seal my fate, leaving the victim to her enemy. And this dishonored sword I trample on with scorn. (Doing so. He drops on a bench overcome with despair.)

JEC—And she, meanwhile? No! No! My venerable head I will bow before the infamous seducer and repeat in his ears: "Give me my daughter." "Give me my daughter." (With tragic transition.) But if he would not hear me ..... If a father's prayers be vain ..... If he should see my tear-dimmed eyes, condemned to darkness ..... Then, Ah! with my grief to guide

me I shall find my way to his iron heart. The sword! The sword! (Feeling for it.) Ah! Here it is. Now for a ray of light, O God of Justice! (Raises his hand as if to tear the eternal veil from his eyes. Then in mournful voice.) The darkness of night! Hate itself cannot dispel. (With decision.) You shall not stop me. I will find a way. (With trembling hands extended, he seeks for the door.)

DAN—(Meeting him on the way.) No. With God alone can vengeance be!

(Jeconiah falls on his knees dropping the sword at Daniel's feet.)

ACT III.

(Hall of the harem. Oriental decorations. Large doors in rear, when opened, reveal vestibule with steps. Back of that a plaza. Time: morning.)

SCENE I.

(Neigel and Rabsares enter at rear of stage.)

NER—Yes, Rabsares, I begin to feel alarmed about your plans.

RAB—Why so?

NER—The Jewish race I have detested since childhood, and the influence of that slave girl whom you have unwisely chosen may work us injury rather than benefit.

RAB—You are dreaming. Belshazzar has given me the management of his harem and I am both custodian and counselor of this Jewish beauty.

NER—Are you sure that if she acquires the influence you wish her to have it will be for our benefit,

and not for her people?

RAB—And what will those low people dare, Nergel? They are not worth your fears.

NER—Perhaps your scorn might help them. I have recent proofs of their boldness and I will seek the king to have him punish them.

RAB—Beware lest you defeat our purpose. The obstacle to our aspirations is Nitocris alone. I consider her the enemy to be feared; and altho the world should prepare to dispute the scepter which we hope to take from her hands, the first thing, Nergel, is to obtain this victory.

NER—I will tell you,—it may astonish you—that the foolish Elda stubbornly resists her master.

RAB—I know it and rejoice at it.

NER—How so?

RAB—Powerful must be the stimulus that rouses the king's heart,—something new.

NER—So you consider it sure .....

RAB—That if some way is left us to kindle in Belshazzar some strong desire, we have it in the savage virtue of that girl.

NER—But do you think the king will allow .....

RAB—O, Nergel! Do you not see it? What might have been a fleeting caprice is taking on from day to day the character of an attachment. The king suffers refusals as tho she were dreaming. Now impatiently, and now with joy, it causes him to wonder. Fear not that he will weary of the struggle.

NER—But, say! Have you not seen a peaceful river break its banks when its course was hindered, and dash itself against the rocks?

RAB—Are you afraid?

NER—Perhaps the day will come when we shall regret that we roused the king from his apathy.

RAB—I am sure that the sovereign, when in pleasure's arms, will slumber as he did in hours of weariness, and neglect the kingdom.

NER—And does he know he has a rival?

RAB—No, and he must never know. Jealousy would be too sharp a goad, and I'll not use it. Elda

and her lover both call Jeconiah father. The monarch has no suspicion of what he considers brotherly love.

NER—But if she discloses the mistake?

RAB—No, the veil grows thicker, for I made her understand that Reuben owes his pardon to that very mistake; and that disarms suspicion.

NER—Perhaps Nitocris .....

RAB—She loves them both, and will guard the secret well. Besides, you will put the wretched husband out of the way.

NER—The king is coming. A new light is in his face. I leave you to talk with him about his loves before I deal with business of the State. (He goes out.)

SCENE II.

(Belshazzar, Rabsares.)

RAB—(Observing the king as he enters.) (Aside.) (Victory is ours.) O, great king!

BEL—Rabsares, dost thou see how calm and brilliant is the day?

RAB—Yes, my lord.

BEL—(Approaching a window) The broad expanse of sky was never more beautiful.

RAB—I notice it. When your frowns disappeared the sun shone brighter and Heaven did rejoice.

BEL—And the air? Those heavy vapors have been changed into light breezes and one breathes more freely.

RAB—Yes, great king.

BEL—O! I seem to be awakening from lethargy profound, and the universe, once enveloped in mist, appears now to be renewed and beautiful.

RAB—(Joyfully) Ah! Yes.

BEL—I cannot doubt it. My heart is casting off a heavy weight. And now it beats. Ah, yes, it throbs!

At last I live! I feel! And now, O Hope, I see thy boundless realm.

RAB—May the mighty gods be praised!

BEL—(As tho speaking to himself) How strange the mystery! It baffles me. Two abject creatures have won the distinction of stirring my royal heart, awakening impulses that astonish me,—that please me. They have dared oppose me. I feel there is a power to subdue. I find they have it.

RAB—If you find joy.....

BEL—Yes! Great is my pleasure on learning that the world which has me for an unhappy master, shelters two souls which I cannot command with a gesture. I like them because they are rare; I respect them because they are strong. It is my highest pleasure that I can love them. I wish to prove it and to be loved in return. Yes, Rabsares, a hundred provinces would I have given for this moment in which I can say: "I feel! Yes, I am a man!"

RAB—Now that you are pardoning Reuben.....

BEL—I command you to have him here with his father.

RAB—To thy harem? Never has its sacred threshold been touched by strangers' feet. Never has it been seen.....

BEL—Enough! It is my will.

RAB—(Disturbed) Great king!

BEL—Henceforth from this place where Fear did dwell I banish oppression and unworthy purpose. Here Elda rules. At her behest let courtiers bend the knee. In these most happy halls I know that love awaits me.

RAB—Your words are laws, and I obey. But I was thinking, my lord, that the beauty who resisted you would acquire greater courage by having converse with her kindred.

BEL—And why?

RAB—You are aware that the captives are fanatical, and are bound by a divine precept not to contract with us who know not the God they worship. What ,then, will they do, but add to the fears of a

girl who rejects your kindness, for now she sees the enemy of her God. Leave that girl deprived of help and counsel. Leave her in solitude. In a short time you will see that the yoke she now spurns will be put about her neck, and her beauty will be at your disposal.

BEL—What matters it to have one woman more! I seek a soul, not a body. Let her father and her brother come.

RAB—(Aside) I am lost.....(Aloud) I will obey.

(When going out he meets Nergel coming in, to whom he whispers:) "Against the Jews tell all you know."

NER—I come for that.

SCENE III.

(Belshazzar, Nergel.)

NER—(Detaining the king who is about to go inside the harem) My Lord!.....

BEL—What has happened?

NER—The people are wild with fears.

BEL—And why?

NER—It is said that Cyrus, in league with the Medes and other nations, is marching upon Babylon.

BEL—And do you come to me with such tales?

NER—The captives are the cause of what I tell thee.

BEL—The captives?

NER—They say that there are books preserved by them which foretell the destruction of your kingdom. With such rumors the mob turns mad, and I suspect the discontented satraps are adding to their fears.

BEL—They are all dreaming. What is needed is to wake them up.

NER—By what means?

BEL—In my palace let a great banquet be given. In that the satraps may forget their intrigue. Tomorrow impose upon the people.....

NER—What?

BEL—A new tribute.

NER—And pronounce sentence upon those evil-hearted captives. I await your command.

BEL—Tell me how many gods are housed within the temples of Babylon?

NER—Many there are. The finest is that consecrated to Belus.

BEL—Yes; that cost a fortune, if I remember rightly. A hundred provinces contributed.

NER—That is true.

BEL—At lesser expense altars can be raised to the god of the Hebrews. This will make those people satisfied.

NER—(Astonished and stepping backward) How, my lord, do you put faith in that foreign god?

BEL—(With mocking irony) O, yes; a great deal! As much faith as in ours.

NER—My lord, I don't know what to tell you. We have perhaps a hundred gods.

BEL—With a hundred and one their weight would not be much increased.

NER—Against the god of the Jews your immortal forefathers swore eternal war.

BEL—My immortal forefathers made fools of themselves.

NER—I beg of you.....

BEL—I ordain that from this day the god of my beautiful slave shall be associated with the Chaldean gods. Go and publish the decree.

NER—How terrible! (He goes out.)

BEL—(Looking inside.) It is she! Here she comes. Her victory will be complete.

SCENE IV.

(Belshazzar, Elda.)

ELDA—My lord, let not your anger rise if I come uncalled by thee. I am uneasy. I cast myself at your feet.

BEL—(restraining her) What do you fear?

ELDA—From my window I have seen people running to the public square. They do not conceal their troubles. They are insulting and they curse the Jews whom they ask you to deliver up to their vengeance.

BEL—Lay aside all anxiety. Those who are dear to you will be held secure.

ELDA—You promise that?

BEL—I swear it by the great good you have done me.

ELDA—I? My lord?

BEL—Put your hand upon this breast which now breathes a purer air, but which formerly felt the chill of death when I was weary and despised all things. Tell me, if you can, what is the malady which drives light from the mind and hope from the heart, stifling all feeling and blunting the senses? Tell me if you see the new light which my soul just perceives. Everything becomes bright before my vision; all things rise higher in my mind.

ELDA—King.....

BEL—What could I deny to her that made me feel and live. Whatever you may ask, that do I resolve to give.

ELDA—If, in the gratitude of this slave-girl.....

BEL—Give me a free and fervent soul. Speak not of slavery!

ELDA—(Aside) O Heavens!

BEL—If you will not make me the gift I desire, what is the world worth to me on my lonely throne?

ELDA—Over that world the fates have given you power and dominion.....

BEL—Which I care not to exercise over degraded creatures.

ELDA—Make them love you. Let the happiness of men fall from your hands, for you are powerful. Do not disinherit them. Be the father of a hundred nations and the void in your heart will be filled with love.

BEL—(surprised at what he hears) Their love?

ELDA—Your forefathers were oppressors. In their

mad pride they even robbed God of his incense, and suffering humanity cursed their impiety. Make men of those who are degraded, and they will proclaim you King of Kings!

BEL—You utter strange thoughts so different from mine. But I think that what you say and wish is good. And if this unbelieving man is to believe and love, it is you that brings the longed-for change. You can prove that a slave may bring happiness to a king. One law, the law of love, makes them both equal. I did not know that law. Yes, let me feel that I am loved by a noble soul; let me owe to you the happiness which I never enjoyed before. Then I will grant you everything and with you I can attain everything.

ELDA—O, my lord, virtue alone brings happiness to man. Today may God in his goodness, thru this imperfect creature, prove to your soul that mankind is noble. Show us, O Belshazzar, that you are worthy to rule. Do not be dominated by evil influence. While a tyrant oppresses me, do not ask the precious gift of a free soul. Do not forget that she who is oppressed with constant anxiety was taken from the bosom of her family by you—that she sees her God without an altar, her people degraded, and her kindred deprived of home.

BEL—You may have guessed what I want to do for you. I will show you at once.

ELDA—What?

BEL—You are a captive no longer.

ELDA—O, my lord!

BEL—Enjoy a blissful life.

ELDA—You announce to me .....

BEL—A victory.

ELDA—May I hope.....

BEL—Behold!

(The door opens, Jeconiah and Reuben appear. Rabsares who has been conducting them retires. The king leaves the scene just as Elda rushes into Jeconiah's arms.)

SCENE V.

(Elda, Jeconiah, Reuben.)

ELDA—My father! (Leading him forward. Reuben remains at a distance).

JEC—Beloved daughter, is it not a dream? Let me touch your head once more. Yes, it is my daughter. It is God's will that I get her back.

ELDA—Yes, father, yes! Reuben! (Going towards him, hand extended.)

REU—Wait. The sacred name of wife can I give to thee?

ELDA—(with dignity) I still live.

REU—(falling at her feet and kissing her hands) Forgive me!

ELDA—O Reuben!

JEC—Do not keep me anxious. Tell me all.

REU—I see it all. The king has a noble temper. He has ordered my treasure restored to me. Say; is it not so?

ELDA—He said: "Enjoy your triumph; may your happiness be complete."

JEC—Who can doubt it? If he calls us here and puts you in our arms could he desire to snatch you from us again?

REU—Where is he? In my joy I would cast myself at his feet.

ELDA—He doubtless wished to give us liberty, but, listen! His footsteps. He comes.

JEC—O God. Fill him with blessings.

REU—And thou, proud heart, subdue thy rancor.

SCENE VI.

(The same. Belshazzar comes out with a writing. Just then the mutterings of the people are heard on the plaza.)

BEL—(To Reuben who comes before him and

kneels) If the fates have not decreed that the lamb should overcome the lion, they have at least made the lion generous. (Raising Reuben by the hand.)

REU—My gratitude, O my lord.

BEL—Let the past be forgotten. I have found a man and him I make the second in my kingdom. (Hands him the paper.)

REU—(astonished) My lord!

BEL—You, Jeconiah, may choose a tranquil dwelling. Rest there after your many trials. I will see that you have everything you need.

JEC—Give me my children and you give me content. Then will my heart forget my sorrows.

REU—O king, tho emotion choke my utterance, I beseech you not to honor us to excess. A hut in the mountains of my fatherland under the sky where the ashes of my forefathers lie,—that is enough for these captives. Give them that and they will bless your name.

JEC—There is a God who will reward thee.

ELDA—O, lord, you have won forever the affection of three hearts.

(The noise outside increases.)

JEC—The shouts of thy people, our enemies, reach our ears. Let not our presence provoke their anger. Grant the captives a return to their native land.

BEL—(listening with surprise and indignation to the shouting) Wait!

(He steps forward to meet Nergel who comes toward him.)

SCENE VII

(The same. Nergel.)

NER—My lord!

BEL—What causes this excited throng?

NER—My lord! They receive your decree with

shouts of anger. The people have always been faithful to their gods.

BEL—Do they dare.....

NER—Their anger has increased because they know that two bold men are hidden here. They know, too, that the younger one offended your royal dignity.

ELDA—(approaching Reuben as if to protect him) Reuben!

JEC—O, my God!

NER—Do you not hear? They are asking for his blood.

JEC—For his blood?

BEL—Open the doors at once.

NER—(hesitating) Is it your desire.....

BEL—Let the people come in.

(Exit Nergel. Thru the open door the crowd may be seen coming into the vestibule.)

ELDA—My lord! (approaching the uneasy King).

BEL—Let them adore this Jewish maiden as my royal wife.

JEC—Elda!

REU—(Aside) What did he say?

ELDA—(aside) Good Heavens!

BEL—It is my wish to place upon you now the mantle of Semiramis.

ELDA—(astonished) Oh!

JEC—My lord! It cannot be.

REU—What? With these favors will you pay me for my wife?

BEL—(thunderstruck) How? What?

REU—Take back the price. (Tears the paper and throws it down.)

BEL—You! You!

JEC—My lord! I think you do not know that she has a husband.

REU—Yes, I am he! In all the world I have no other happiness. Do not deprive me of that love which is my life, my only treasure among the gifts of Heaven.

BEL—(motionless with pent-up anger.) Not brother and sister?

ELDA—Fear, my lord, kept me from confessing it. May your clemency excuse my weakness. I pour my tears at your feet.

JEC—(prostrate before the king.) Be great, O King Belshazzar, do not recall your pledges.

REU—(at the king's feet) Do not crush justice with passion. The impulse of a ruler is not that of your own heart.

BEL—Not brother and sister? They were lying. And I thought I was meeting noble souls! The truth,—the truth,—I would find it among men!

(Bursts into convulsive laughter.)

REU—(rising to his feet, Elda and Jeconiah likewise). O king.....

JEC—(aside) I tremble.

BEL—(with bitter sarcasm) And they even ask me to make their victory complete.

ELDA—O! What I ask is justice. I beg thee for my husband in the name of God.

BEL—(throwing her to the soldiers) Return to prison, you wretched slave! May your neck bend to the yoke, and your shame avenge me!

JEC—(attempting to defend her as the guards take her away) Not so, O barbarous king!

REU—My dead body will oppose you before you carry out your threat.

(The populace invade the vestibule and utter half-suppressed cries. They crowd upon the steps.)

ELDA—(Struggling desperately) O, my lord, do not disgrace thyself before these people.

REU—(Placing himself between Elda and the king) Do not exhaust the patience of one in misfortune.

BEL—(Beside himself) People, you ask me for prey to serve your fury? Here you have it. (Throws Reuben into the crowd. Noise and confusion. The king leaves hurriedly.)

ELDA—O Heaven!

JEC—No!

REU—Rabble, let go!

JEC—My children!

ELDA—My husband! Help! Pardon! Oh! (Becomes unconscious. They carry her away.)

NER—Tear that wretch to pieces. Scatter his bloody remains in the plaza.

THE MOB—Death! Death! (They drag him toward the vestibule.)

REU—O Father! father!

JEC—Take me with him. Take me, too! (Falls in the middle of the stage. The queen appears and runs to the defense of the victim.)

NIT—May the gods help us!

ACT IV.

(Banquet Hall. Magnificent decorations. Resplendent with light. The royal divan at the right. Semi-circular tables for the feasts. Perfumes. Vessels of gold and silver, etc. Garlands. Trophies. Columns. Statues. Fountains. Hanging gardens in the background. The towers of Babylon. Occasional lightning. Thunder at a distance. Music.)

SCENE I.

(Belshazzar, Nitocris.)

(The king lying on the divan absorbed in thought. The queen speaks and he shudders. She throws herself at her son's feet.)

NIT—My lord! I come to return the seal of state which your royal hand gave to me.

BEL—And why, O Nitocris?

NIT—(rising) My grief reveals it. With this I attempted to prevent the triumph of a mob. In defense of the victim, I ran and ran, but it was too late.

BEL—Well, no more, O Queen. (Turns his face away.)

NIT—From this day I renounce all sway. I hope the rabble will applaud your rule.

BEL—O Queen!

NIT—(handing over the royal seal.) Take it. I hoped that Heaven would reward me for my cares and give me the rest I craved,—that, shaking off your lethargy, you would arise great and glorious. Could you but make your mother proud and your people happy!

BEL—Entrust that power to the gods. I cannot give what I cannot possess. Happiness! It is a phantom, which a madman pursues. There is no certainty but evil. Suffering is no mystery. (Rising) In a fit of madness I conceived to my injury, a treacherous hope.

NIT—O, Belshazzar!

BEL—(with dejection) It was like smoke, leaving no trace behind. It has gone. That illusion, brief dream, has vanished. I returned to this accursed world where everything withers and pleasure is a mockery. I hear again a voice that whispers: "There is no love, no truth, no happiness. All is misery. All is lies." .....

NIT—(Aside) Unhappy soul!

BEL—That voice permits no joy. It wraps itself in the shades of night and decks itself in the light of day. It disturbs the quiet of the one and mars the brightness of the other. It re-echoes in the depths of the universe and of the human soul.

NIT—And you want to .....

BEL—I want it drowned with noise and revelry or with the agony of a distressed world.

NIT—Oh!

BEL—Well, what does it matter? If that voice do

not sound in my ears, songs or curses, laughter or groans, will alike be grateful music.

NIT—O, my lord! If love and constancy did not exist, two noble beings would have a different lot. Your weary heart hated the very being you should have loved. But you have trampled, as a king, on what you were seeking as a man. You cannot appreciate the worth of outraged humanity without feeling the pain of never being loved.

BEL—Well, then, if hope must not come to the unhappy throne,—if the most miserable of men can attain what I desire in vain,—if the inheritance of kings is solitude where there is no star to light up the darkness of existence,—then I wish that useless power may weigh as heavily upon the world as upon myself. Enough! Perhaps I may, at length, obtain a monarch's victory. (With irony) Perhaps the wild revelry of the feast has comfort for my soul. Honor it with thy presence. (Drops on the divan.)

NIT—(sadly) Your wish will be gratified. (She leaves. At another door Nergel appears.)

SCENE II.

(Belshazzar, Nergel.)

NER—(Aside) What insolence! (Aloud) My lord, the wise Daniel is bent on speaking to you.

BEL—Of what?

NER—Perhaps he claims the slave whose uncle he is. And I make bold to say you will lose nothing if you give her up.

BEL—Explain yourself.

NER—Her mind suffers; it is deranged.

BEL—(Astonished) How?

NER—She is delirious. She is raving to get out, and implores your clemency for her husband. Again,

with heart weighed down by other recollections, she hides her face and with cries of fury she says,—she gives out that.....

BEL—Enough! (Rising) The banquet should be ready.

NER—All your brilliant court is waiting, my lord!

BEL—I need this foolish pomp and wild rejoicing. (Exulting.) Let the royal show be dazzling. Let the air I breathe be filled with intoxicating odors. Let the wine bubble in goblets of gold. Let drunkenness add noise to the feast. I want to forget myself.

NER—All your directions will be observed, my lord. (Exit.)

SCENE III.

(Belshazzar, afterwards Daniel. Then Nergel.)

BEL—She is crazy. (with sarcasm) Oh! weak and broken clay which fate destroys at the first clash. (Daniel enters.) Pity, begone! All affection is delirium. (He is about to leave when Daniel meets him.)

DAN—I am Daniel, O King Belshazzar!

BEL—(Stepping back) What is it you would have? They tell me you are a great magician.

DAN—They misinformed you. I do not respect thy Chaldean soothsayers.

BEL—I infer that you excel them.

DAN—My lord, I am not a sage.

BEL—Then by what artifice have you succeeded in passing for one?

DAN—Like a little echo, I repeat the words of truth, like those which here I speak.

BEL—How, Daniel? Your god .....

DAN—Our God, the only God, the Infinite One, Lord of Heaven and Earth. He speaks to thee, Belshazzer, thru me, His servant.

BEL—And what does that god say to me? To me

He is unknown.

DAN. The universe proclaims His name. It is written in the Heavens and in the angry sea. The winds declare it. Night with its darkness, the sun with its burning rays, the storm with its thunders, and the zephyr with its breath,—declare His Name.

BEL. (With sarcasm.) Yes. Here in this world I hear men invoke some hidden judge who never answers. I see a force, at once fitful and blind, that works haphazard, and destroys what it creates, with no law but caprice. Happiness is a fleeting shadow and justice but a name with which the strong make sport. In the background of this picture is the grave,—always the grave. In its cold and filthy dust ignominy is mingled with glory, the virtues with the vices. By such traits does that wise Providence manifest itself to me, O Daniel. Give it whatsoever name is fitting and let it speak. (Sits down and listens disdainfully.)

DAN. (Drawing nearer) If evil triumphs in this world (and of this you are a living proof),—if innocence is crushed by the power of the ungodly, and in the grave the just are mingled with the unjust, heed the warning that comes from beyond the grave!

BEL. And in the name of thy god do you offer no more?

DAN. Yes! In His great balance are weighed the vices and the virtues of kingdoms. If evil destroys the equilibrium at length, if the last trace of honor disappears and an empire, overwhelmed by its vices, infects the earth with corruption, then God renews it by an upheaval that buries old nations in a great abyss.

BEL. I judge you to be mad rather than wise if you believe you could frighten me with your predictions. Where was your god when we destroyed your temple and left its altars without sacrifices? And where was he when this earth on which you work was watered with your tears?

DAN. He punishes our sins and vindicates our martyrdom. Yes, He denied us the victory. We fell

under thy arms, but our people will soon break their fetters.

BEL—And this glorious event,—what prophet has foretold it?

DAN—The same, O king, who announced the coming of Cyrus under whose sword the Assyrian throne will crumble.

BEL—(Rising but controlling his anger.) Not by contempt alone, do I give the lie to your predictions. Promise liberty to your wretched people, and, if I choose. I can annihilate them.

DAN—You cannot.

BEL—Why so?

DAN—That people, as it is predicted, neither you nor any other monarch will ever be able to destroy.

BEL—(Sarcastically) No?

DAN—(Earnestly) No! That people was chosen as the cradle of the truth and its constant witness; and it must endure thruout the ages.

BEL—Well then, I want a proof of the power of thy god. Nergel! Guards!

DAN—Do not, unhappy king, make worse thy destiny.

BEL—(To Nergel and guards who enter) Arrest that madman. And tomorrow let all the Jews bow down to what they call their idols. If they resist, put them to the sword!

DAN—Belshazzar!

BEL—(With irony) Let God's powerful hand come to your aid. (Leaves. Daniel is taken thru another door. The prophet looks toward the king with pity. The scene is left vacant. Music and distant thunder.)

SCENE IV.

(The Queen. Rabsares. Satraps. Magicians. The King's wives, etc.)

NIT—Soon will the king be here and make your

joy complete. I rejoice to see together in our palace the courtly nobles and the wisest men.

A SATRAP—Of that court which adores thee, O Queen, receive our homage. (To Rabsares, aside) When is her downfall arranged for?

A MAGICIAN—Wisdom can have no greater glory than to deserve thy kindness.

NIT—I wish to ask you what the Heavens declare. Do not the stars you read say anything?

MAGICIAN—They tell much.

NIT—Relate it to me.

MAGICIAN—(To the court.) You may all know it. (Boldly) By many signs which the learned can interpret, immortal Belus commands the world to raise altars to the king, worthy of his majesty. Decorate them and let the people worship him as a god from heaven.

(Aside) I hope to be a pontiff.

2nd SATRAP—With joy and reverence I receive the high decree.

2nd MAG—It must be done.

1st MAG—I hope so. (General assent.)

NIT—(To the first satrap) What can you tell us of your domain?

1st SATRAP—It grows more prosperous every day.

NIT—But alarming rumors come.

SATRAP—I do not understand .....

NIT—Reasons for complaint are given.

SATRAP—Bah! Nothing at all. They say they are too much burdened with taxes.

NIT—It is said there were some violent deaths, also.

SATRAP—Well, yes, a hundred captives.

NIT—Were they openly rebellious?

SATRAP—They became dull and lazy,—almost useless.

RAB—The king approaches.

MAG—May he always be victorious and may we live in the light of his glory.

ALL—Glory to the king! (All bow profoundly as Belshazzar enters with Nergel.)

SCENE V.

(The same. Belshazzar. Nergel. Slaves serving the table. Music in the garden joins its echoes with the thunder which becomes more frequent and prolonged.)

BEL—Satraps, I want unfettered joy to reign here now.

RAB—(In a low voice to the satraps) Never have I seen his countenance so gloomy.

BEL—Let us have excitement, noise and revelry. Amongst perfumes and women let us lose our reason. To your seats!

RAB—(In a low voice to the first satrap) Never have I heard a king ere now dictate in such a tone to the joy of feasting.

SATRAP—Let us obey.

(The king takes his seat at the head of the table and indicates to his mother the seat at the other end. All take their seats. The slaves remain standing in the rear.)

BEL—Let the wine fill our golden cups.

NER—(Serving him) Here is Cyprian wine of the finest quality.

SATRAP—Its aroma is enough to intoxicate.

2nd SATRAP—You are right.

MAG—This nectar is divine.

RAB—(Raising his goblet) To the health of the great King Belshazzar!

MAG—To Belshazzar, the god!

SATRAP—May Babylon consecrate an altar to our king!

SOME—Glory to the king!

OTHERS—Glory to the god!

SCENE VI.

(The same and Elda who enters on the right disheveled, her clothes in disorder, mental derangement

revealed in her whole appearance.)

NIT—(As Elda enters) Merciful Heavens! It is she!

BEL—(Aside) What do I see!

ELDA—(Who seems not to notice the king or his court) I have succeeded at last. I am here. No one follows me.

BEL—(Rising and directing at Rabsares an angry and reproving glance) Rabsares!

RAB—(Humbly) My lord! It was my absence from the harem that.....

NER—I will have this mad woman removed from thy presence without delay.

(Everyone rises. Some step aside from the table as if going to Elda.)

NIT—(To the king) Be merciful!

BEL—Take charge of her.

NIT—(Approaching Elda anxiously. The girl is agitated and walks about the hall as if she recognizes it with some pleasure.) Elda! Oh Elda!

ELDA—Ah! Thou! Take me! I would ask the despot for my husband's pardon.

NIT—(Withdrawing her eyes from the girl, with an expression of sorrow) Unhappy girl!

ELDA—That cruel order yet sounds within my ears. I hear the howling mob that rushes on its prey!

NIT—Oh! Oh!

ELDA—Run! Let us run! Don't let those hungry beasts ..... Oh come, come! I still have hope! O, run!

NIT—(Aside) O, sad illusion!

ELDA—(Stopping) Ah! Don't you hear it?

NIT—'Tis the whizzing of the wind.

ELDA—It sounds like a long wail.

NIT—A groundless fear disturbs you. You are in our house ..... (Sadly) and there is nothing to fear.

ELDA—Nothing?

NIT—Nothing. You should believe me.

ELDA—(To the queen with an air of mystery.) At last I was able to gain entrance. I made my escape.

Keep the secret. I escaped without making a noise. I ran over streets and public squares. My heart throbbed all the time. My feet seemed to be slipping in the blood ..... but I ran ..... I ran.... a hundred specters followed me.

NIT—Elda! O, my poor Elda!

ELDA—At last I came to the doors of this palace. Yes, this is it! A pang seized me. But I found the doors open. All the court together rushed inside. They went to burn incense ..... And I ..... I felt in my heart, in spite of my terror, a new hope spring up! With all my strength I tried to move my feet. I tried to get thru the crowd,—to go before the throne, and cry: "Mercy and pardon for my unfortunate husband."

NIT—And what then?.....

ELDA—In vain my anxious heart redoubled its efforts. I could not reach the palace door. I fought.. I fought..... I felt like a piece of marble.

NIT—But now you are with me and more at your ease, I trust.

ELDA—Yes, it is so! God took pity at last. With one great effort I reached the threshold. And now..... here..... How many trophies of the Chaldean monarchs! How many purple robes and laurel wreaths! How many lights that shame the day! And the odor of the flowers! And the echoes of sweet sounds! (She stops as if listening to music but suddenly gloom covers her face and she seems to be seized with fear.)

NIT—(aside) Oh, I cannot bear it.

ELDA—Darkness and gloom follow the brightness. The fragrant perfumes fade away. The jubilant victor is silent, and pleasant sounds melt into moans. All is frightful silence! All is darkness! My brow is cold!

(The king who is listening with gloomy countenance approaches her mechanically; the courtiers imitate him.)

ELDA—(continuing) The air grows thick and

heavy. (with desperate resolve) But no matter! I persist. I want to find the king. (She takes some steps.) My voice calls him. No one answers. Everything is hidden in the shadow. (Takes some more steps and stops again full of fear.) The pavement sounds hollow under my feet.....

BEL—(advancing further) Hapless girl! Your sovereign holds out to you a friendly hand.

ELDA—(Full of fright, she points out an object where the king stands.) Look! Look! Look!

NIT—It is the king.

ELDA—A tomb! And another!..... and another!..... and another! ..... a hundred! A hundred tombs spring forth!

NIT—Oh! come to me.

ELDA—Thus in a brief time is cleared the mystery. I thought I was in a palace..... It is a vast cemetery.....

NIT—Elda!

ELDA—Let us fly. (She starts, then stops, struck with horror.) Ah! bloody phantoms, what do you want of me? Don't bar my way! Don't cry and wail! What! Your motionless eyes are fixed on me? You call me and point my place among the dead? No! No! I want to live. I am young and I am loved! I want to follow the master of my life,—everywhere, like a faithful wife. (Stops as tho she heard something that horrifies her.) What! What! What!

NIT—(aside) Such fearful madness!

ELDA—What cruel laughter comes from your hollow throats, and echoes in the empty graves! Why point you at my forehead with bitter jest? You lie. There is no stain upon it! The mind that suspects as much is raving! In vain.....No! No! Never! Stop, you tyrant! Hold back! Take pity on my innocence! What! You do not hear me? You wish for my dishonor. Ah! I run..... Reuben! Father! Come to me! Help!

(She flees and meeting the king who advances to-

ward her as if to silence her. She recognizes him and steps back horrified, uttering a cry.)

ELDA—(continuing) No! it is too late! Too late! (Drops on the floor.)

NIT—Heavens!

RAB—(hastening with others to Elda who lies unconscious.) Unfortunate girl!

BEL—Take her away! (Rabsares and two slaves do so.)

SCENE VII.

(The same except Elda and Rabsares.)

NIT—(with a sad accent of reproof) Belshazzar!

NER—The appearance of that lunatic has sufficiently disturbed thee, great king!

BEL—(Attempting to shake off his remorse, and with feverish animation which culminates almost in a fit of insanity.) Yes! let the fiery wine pass round anew! Let us drink and drink until the sun drives night away! (He approaches the table, the courtiers also, crowding at both ends and the middle of the semi-circle but without sitting. They take hold of the goblets.)

SATRAP—I am going to propose another toast, with your leave.

BEL—Propose it!

SATRAP—To the poor Hebrew girl who came to augment the seductive confusion of the feast!

BEL—Good! To her health!

(As all raise their goblets, Jeconiah appears. He advances with tottering steps and wan countenance. He comes by the same door through which Elda was taken out.)

SCENE VIII.

(The same and Jeconiah.)

JEC—To thy glory! I come also to drink a toast

BEL—You!

NIT—Jeconiah!

JEC—Your joy would not be complete if the heart of this father did not respond.

BEL—Old man!

JEC—Yes, let us drink! You are a son of Nimrod. You are the idol of a people that shook the earth and left a track of blood behind. If you look upon compassion as a weakness, if you consider virtue as a name, and misfortune as a disgrace,—what does it matter? You say there is no God,—no Judge Supreme. You teach men that suffering is their destiny; that if the world gives them masters, Heaven holds no god for them.

BEL—Enough! Old man!

JEC—(earnestly) But thou art mistaken, O Belshazzar. The hope of nations, the soul's aspiration, are not myths. God exists, the Lord of Lords, before whom king and vassal are equal. And to this great justice do I raise my voice against thee.

BEL—Well, let the God of Jacob manifest his glory; and that you may drink more worthily to him, bring the sacred vessels from Solomon's temple!

JEC—(stepping back, horror-stricken) What hast thou said?

BEL—I want to show you the value of your toast. (Takes the vessels.)

JEC—Stop! Sacriligious man!

BEL—(handing him a vessel) Take it!

JEC—Never!

BEL—I command you!

JEC—Beware.

BEL—(In tone of derision and raising his goblet.) To the King of Kings before whom I have been summoned.

(The courtiers, intoxicated, burst out laughing. As they are about to raise the cups to their lips, a strong wind opens the doors and windows of the hall; throwing the statues from their pedestals and

putting out the lights. The music stops, the sacred cups fall from the sacrilegous hands. Amidst the darkness and general horror a loud clap of thunder is heard and in front of the king in characters of fire appear the words: Mene, Tekel, Upharsin! (All withdraw in fear.)

NIT—(Pointing to the letters) Look! Look!

SATRAPS—(Aside) I tremble.

MAG—What an awful mystery!

1st Sat—My blood curdles!

2nd Mag—A real enigma!

NIT—See, you famous magicians, those traces of mysterious flames, traced by a hand invisible. They shine with ill-omened splendor.

NER—Look at them! If your science is not a lie, I conjure you by the gods to tell their meaning!

MAG—That inspires terror..... It is a mystery.

BEL—(who has remained motionless with his eyes on the ominous writing.) Quick! Your life depends on this!

NIT—Speak, O man of wisdom!

MAG—This mystery profound I cannot penetrate.

BEL—(To the magicians) You! You!

2nd Mag—(While the others are distressed and shake their heads) No, my lord. There is no one in the wide world who can explain.

SATRAP—They are paralyzed with fear.

NIT—O king, there is a man in Babylon who did interpret dreams to thy great father.

BEL—Daniel!

NIT—I dared not pronounce his name. He is among those who are condemned to die. Call him!

NER—He is a prisoner in the palace.

BEL—Let him come at once. (Nergel goes out.)

JEC—(Aside) Daniel! the Judgment of God!

NIT—His mouth was always the organ of divine truth!

BEL—(with a shudder) (Aside) Of the truth!

JEC—God enlightens him.

NIT—He will understand the mystery of those characters which alarm our minds.

BEL—If he will explain the meaning, whether propitious or adverse, I swear to adorn him and to grant whatever he may ask.

NIT—He is coming.

SATRAP—Here he comes.

BEL—(Aside) In spite of myself, I am fearful.

JEC—(Aside) My heart is stirred with emotion.

SCENE IX.

(The same. Daniel. Nergel. Slaves with torches.)

DAN—Here am I, Belshazzar. Tell me what you want.

BEL—(with trembling voice.) Explain that writing and you may expect gifts from my royal hands.

DAN—Keep your gifts, O King, I shall not accept them. But I will decipher those characters for you.

BEL—I hear you.

NIT—(Aside) My heart oppresses me.

JEC—(Aside) To thee, Oh God, I raise my soul.

BEL.—Quick! Why do you wait? Tell me their meaning!

(There is a moment of silence.)

DAN—God has weighed thy justice and found it wanting. He has numbered thy days. That crown which thy pride exalts, a foreign hand will snatch away. The Medes and the Persians will destroy thy great empire, which, burdened with centuries of crime, will expiate at last thy bloody sway.

SATRAP—Revenge prompts him to say that!

NER—It is a lie!

NIT—O, my son!

JEC—(Raising his hands toward heaven) I reverence, O God, thy unfathomable justice.

SATRAP—Punish the perfidious Jew!

NER—The imposter should be put to death!

BEL—(Magnanimously) Silence! A solemn pledge have I given and I order its fulfillment immediately. (Taking off his robes) See upon his shoulders the purple of kings!

DAN—(Rejecting it) Cyrus is coming to demand it.

BEL—Belshazzar wears it yet. Demand what you wish and it is yours. But, Daniel, if your predictions are not fulfilled, tomorrow will not find the remains of the people of Zion.

SCENE X.

(The same. Rabsares.)

RAB—Arm yourself at once, O, King Belshazzar.

BEL—What dost thou say?

RAB—Without delay! Cyrus is at your gates!

NIT—O, adverse fate!

BEL—Cyrus!

NER—What vile treachery!

RAB—There is no treachery. (To Nitocris) Your fatal lack of foresight!

NIT—What? ....

RAB—You knew how to confine the Euphrates in big lakes, but were not prudent enough to stop them up.

NIT—Good Heavens!

RAB—Now is King Cyrus wise. Taking advantage of the darkness, he has turned the river aside and gets free passage for his army. I have prepared for the defense, and he will find that punishment awaits him. But there is confusion everywhere.

(The king takes the armor which Rabsares gives him and puts it on hurriedly.)

NIT—My son! My son! would you face the wrath of God? Fly with me!

BEL—Let the women withdraw at once! We.....

NIT—(Joining her hands in supplication) O, Belshazzar.

BEL—At the enemy! Let us go! (He goes out with Nergel, Rabsares and the others. The women take refuge within the palace.)

SCENE XI

(Nitocris, Daniel, Jeconiah, afterwards Rabsares and finally Belshazar and Nergel.)

NIT—Take pity on this unfortunate mother. Pray, to thy angry God. Ask mercy for my son!

DAN—(Aside) O Lord, make short this suffering!

NIT—(To Daniel) With my tears, with my heart's blood, blot out the cruel judgment! Look! O. Look! How horribly it glares among the shadows!

JEC—(Aside) O wretched mother!

NIT—Can you not find one ray of hope to soothe my fears?

DAN—Ask Heaven, O queen.

NIT—(In despair) That Heaven is my enemy! Dost thou not hear?Arms are clashing at the palace doors and angry voices do I hear above the fray.

JEC—(Aside) O fateful day!

DAN—(Aside) How terribly, O Lord, dost thou vindicate thy justice!

NIT—(Who is listening anxiously) The tumult increases. It grows nearer. O my son! O Babylon! Thy fate will be decided this dreadful night.

RAB—(Entering disarmed and terrified) Where can I hide?

NIT—What of the king?

RAB—An heroic defense does he make, but in vain.

NIT—And you?

RAB—I would save my life. Do thou the same, if there is yet time. (Flees by the opposite side.)

NIT—O wretch! Shall the king struggle alone? Oh, no. Let the victor's swords pierce also his mother's heart !

DAN—Hold! Look! (Nergel and others enter with

the wounded king. Two slaves light the scene with torches.)

NIT—O. Belshazzar!

NER—His life is ebbing. It is near the end!

(They put him on the divan where he appeared at the beginning of the scene. Nergel withdraws.)

JEC—Thou art avenged, O, my children! Mercy may triumph now! For the power which punishes is also the power which forgives.

SCENE XII.

(Belshazzar, Nitrocris, Daniel, Jeconiah and slaves bearing torches.)

BEL—That voice! ..... Ah! The justice it invoked was not a myth..... It has heard him.... and its victory overthrows a whole empire!

NIT—(Aside) My courage fails me at such proof.

BEL—Come near, old man. Let me press your hand. Let me not hear you curse me now.

JEC—No! my religion is holy and makes a duty of forgiveness. Die in peace, O king! (He puts his hand on the head of the dying monarch.)

BEL—Ah, no more! Their God!..... Mother,.... I am dying..... But the truth shines forth. A God that elevates man..... that is the true God! (He makes a supreme effort to sit up as he confesses God; then falls into his mother's arms.)

DAN—May such an end blot out his life and all its errors!

NIT—He is no more..... Those shouts! Our palace is invaded. (Pointing to her son) But they shall not profane his body, nor must my eyes witness the infamy of Assyrian rule. (She wrests a torch from a slave and goes to the interior of the palace.)

SCENE XIII.

(Daniel, Jeconiah and afterwards Nitocris.)

JEC—Flee, Daniel, follow her example. That conquering Cyrus.....

DAN—(with solemn voice and advancing to the middle of the stage.) It is he whom the Lord has chosen to erect the new temple. (With prophetic inspiration.) The centuries pass quickly. That temple will be lighted with new splendors in the happy days to come.

JEC—How? Daniel!

DAN—That temple will hear the voice of the Messiah.

JEC—(Falling on his knees and clasping his hands with rapture.) "O Gracious Heaven!"

NIT—(Enters throwing away the torch with which she has set the palace on fire) Flee, all ye who can! Belshazzar, I come to thy cold body. Our palace will not be profaned by those impious wretches. Farewell! Farewell!

(She casts herself upon the corpse. Fire blazes within the palace. Victorious Persians in the rear are lighted up by the fire.)

THE END.

SOME OPINIONS OF "BELSHAZZAR."

Ina Coolbrith, poet, and former Librarian of the Bohemian Club, wrote: You are to be congratulated upon your translation, so perfect that the reader would not suspect it to have been written in any tongue other than the smooth, fine English into which you have transposed it. While calling for a magnificent stage-setting, it is a gem of literary merit as well—a rare combination.

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Joaquin Miller's opinion is expressed in the following lines written by his daughter Juanita while the poet of the Sierras was ill in bed: "I read over his shoulder, and the gloaming came but we were still reading: then he said: "Light me a candle, Babe, I want to continue." So he finished the play in bed, holding the manuscript in one hand and the candle in the other, while I tore myself away to prepare supper, but could not eat until I, too, had finished reading. It is compelling, thrilling. * * * * Congratulations!"

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Madge Morris (Mrs. Harr Wagner) editor and poet: It is distinctively a great play, and, besides is beautiful literature. The drama will have an added glory in its production.

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Hon. Chas. A. Towne, former U. S. Senator from Minnesota, read the play twice, and wrote: "I read the play with great care and interest. It seems to me to possess several very strong dramatic elements, both of character and situation. * * * * It is grand, statuesque tragedy."

Adolfo Vivas, consul for Nicaragua, who read the Spanish original and this English translation at the same time, wrote that the work is "a very fine and accomplished version, and interesting." He expressed the hope that the play might be put upon the American stage, and closed by asserting that the translation is "a beautiful addition to the field of English literature."

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Fred Emerson Brooks, poet and dramatic reader: In "Belshazzar" you have an intensely interesting play. It is as great as "Ben Hur," and, well staged, should be as popular. The scene of Belshazzar's Feast, with its handwriting on the wall, would be the climax of stage-craft. Your play has a grip on me yet. It is unforgetable.

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Mr. Jerome A. Hart, author of "Sardou and the Sardou Plays," and former editor of The Argonaut: I have read with much interest and pleasure the drama "Belshazzar" in the English form as translated by you. I have referred to the Spanish text at times, and have always found that your version gives the spirit of the original—which is better than to give the letter. The play, in addition to its literary merit, affords unique opportunity for gorgeous stage setting and costumes, notably in the scene of Belshazzar's feast. It would seem if a play possessing a strong Biblical flavor, as well as its intrinsic interest, ought to be a popular as well as a literary success.

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Mr. Herbert Bashford, author of "The Woman He Married," in which Virginia Harned starred with great success, writes: Finished Belshazzar late last evening (or was it this morning?) Really when one

becomes so absorbed in a fine piece of work one pays little heed to time or place. Anyway, the drama proved of absorbing interest. It is excellent in construction, the author having avoided all hackneyed devices, and lends itself to magnificent staging and electrical effects so essential in these days to the success of a biblical drama. You are to be congratulated on your translation. It is admirably done, free from all trite, bookish expressions, and also free from the archaic phraseology which always makes such plays seem so unreal and far-fetched. You have humanized the characters and given us men and women of real flesh and blood, altho they did move and have being many centuries ago. The drama is particularly notable in this respect, and you are to be complimented on such a fine, bold rendering of the Spanish text.

WM. F. BURBANK

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